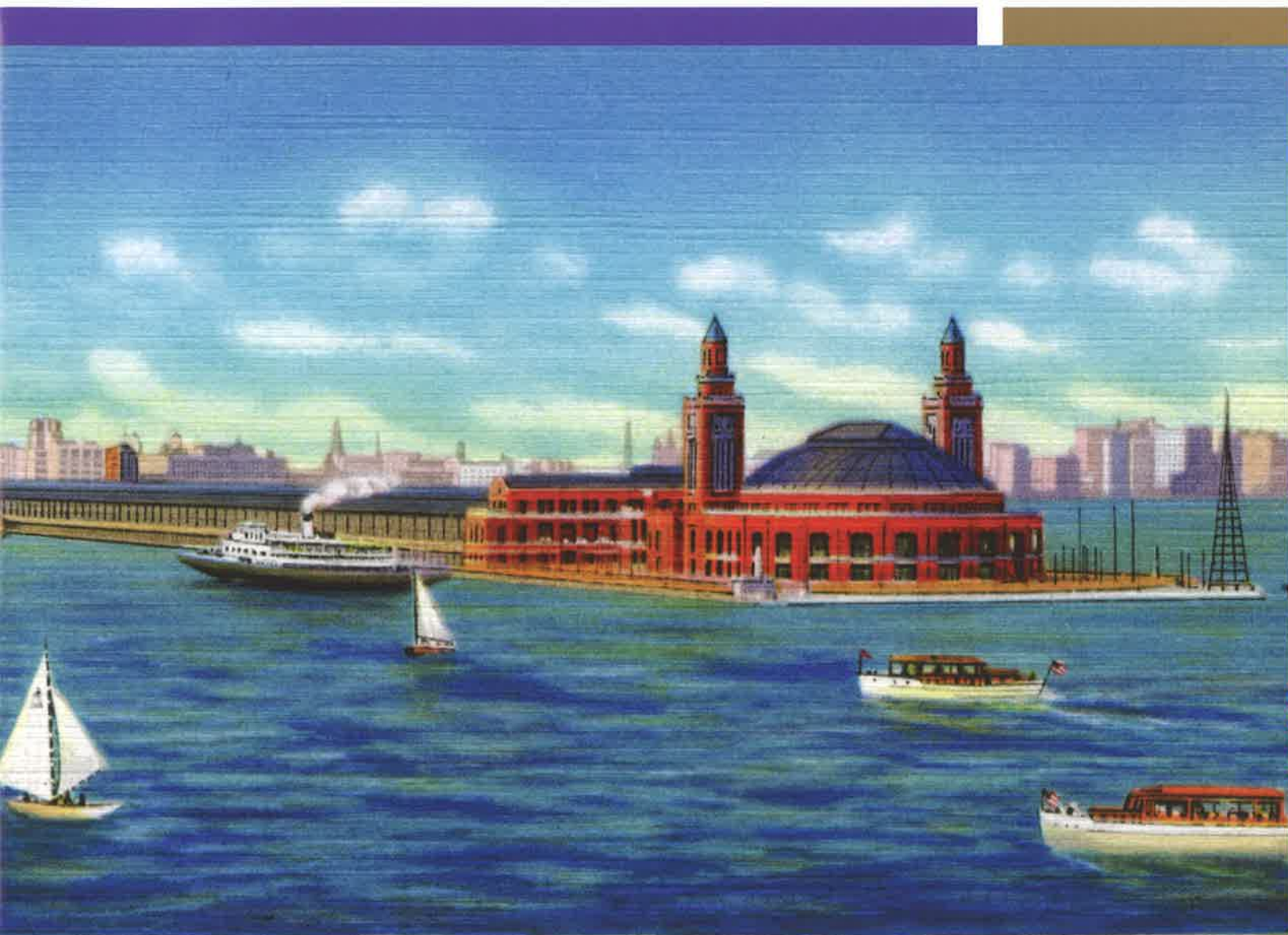




Image File

A Journal
from the
Curt Teich
Postcard
Archives

Lake County Discovery Museum Volume 19 | Number 1 | 2013



Cover Story

The Battle of Streeterville

Chicago's shoreline was once home to grimy industrial buildings and smokestacks billowing black smoke into the air. The transformation of this area from grim to green parkland was due in large part to George "Cap" Streeter. *See page 3.*

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Image File, A Journal from the Curt Teich Postcard Archives
www.TeichArchives.org

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 Heather M. Johnson, Editor

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Image File provides a forum for discussions related to twentieth century culture. Articles, review essays, and offers to review books or suggestions of books to review can be submitted for consideration. Guidelines for submission of articles are available upon request, hjohnson@lcpd.org or, Curt Teich Archives, *Image File* Editor, 27277 N. Forest Preserve Road, Wauconda, Illinois 60084.

For information on museum membership, subscriptions and back issues,
 call 847-968-3381

Unless otherwise noted, all images are from the collections of the Curt Teich Postcard Archives.
 Contact us for information on using postcards from the Teich Archives.

Email: TeichArchives@lcpd.org | Phone: 847-968-3381

27277 N. Forest Preserve Road, Wauconda, IL 60084

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Research hours: 9:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday by appointment

Lake County Forest Preserves

www.LCFPD.org



Lake County
 DISCOVERY
 museum

The Lake County Discovery Museum, a department of the Lake County Forest Preserves, is located 40 miles northwest of Chicago in the Lakewood Forest Preserve; Route 176 and Fairfield Road, Wauconda, Illinois 60084; 847-968-3400. www.LakeCountyDiscoveryMuseum.org.

The museum is a public educational institution devoted to preserving history through its collections and the presentation of inspiring exhibitions. Primary areas of expertise for research and programming include the history of Lake County, Illinois and the history of postcards. The Curt Teich Postcard Archives, a division of the museum, consists of millions of historic images that tell the story of late nineteenth and twentieth century life. A permanent exhibition on the history and significance of postcards is on display at the museum.



Completed in 1916, Navy Pier was originally known as the Chicago Municipal Pier. It was built to be both functional and serve as a recreation pier. It is part of the Streeterville neighborhood and a Chicago destination spot. 1933. 3AH57.

Mucha: Expanding Art Nouveau

A new exhibition of the works of Alphonse Mucha features objects from the archives' John High Collection. Alphonse Mucha brought the elegance of the Art Nouveau movement to everyday and commercial objects through his designs for postcards, posters, magazines, jewelry and much more. The new exhibit complements the Mucha postcards and posters that are on display as part of the permanent *Bringing the World Home* postcard exhibit.



Image File Receives Illinois Association of Museums Award of Excellence

In 2012 the redesigned *Image File* was nominated for and was honored to receive the Illinois Association of Museums' (IAM) Award of Excellence for periodicals.

The redesign was intended to create an inviting, easy to read design with ample space for postcard illustrations, in response to a readership survey. The Award of Excellence was an acknowledgement of achieving these goals. IAM gives the Award of Excellence to member organizations in a variety of areas such as conservation, preservation, exhibits, special programs, and publications, based on their own merits.

A New Dimension for the Postcard Art Competition and Exhibition (PACE)

The Lake County Discovery Museum and Curt Teich Postcard Archives' Postcard Art Competition and Exhibition (PACE) is temporarily on hiatus for 2013.

In place of the PACE event, the archives is planning to release a book featuring the artwork from each of the competitions and exhibitions from 1995 to 2011. Each chapter will represent one competition and showcase the thirty-six exhibition pieces from that year. PACE has been held nine times since the first competition in 1995; the book brings together all of the artwork for the first time.

The PACE website, www.lcpd.org/pace will be updated with book release dates and future competition information.

The Battle of Streeterville

David Clark



9639. LAKE SHORE DRIVE, CHICAGO, ILL.



On July 10, 1886, Captain George Wellington “Cap” Streeter’s steamboat, the “Reutan,” ran aground on a sandbar located 450 feet from Lake Michigan’s shoreline on the north side of Chicago. This event began a three decade, often-bloody battle for land rights that would eventually lead to the extension of Chicago’s Lake Shore Drive and creation of a section of Chicago now known as Streeterville; the location of some of the most valuable real estate in the United States.

At the eastern end of Route 66, drivers are faced with a choice; they must decide whether to turn north or south on Chicago’s Lake Shore Drive. Heading east through downtown Chicago and into Grant Park on Lake Michigan’s shore, Route 66 follows Jackson Boulevard to its terminus. Turning north on Lake Shore Drive (U.S. Highway 41) leads past Monroe Harbor on the east and Millennium Park on the west.

After crossing the Chicago River on the Outer Drive Bridge, Navy Pier comes into view to mark the southern edge of Streeterville. The high-rises and mansions of the Gold Coast tower on the left as one motors toward a tight curve to the west at Oak Street Beach. Lake Shore Drive continues beyond Streeterville, six miles further north to Hollywood Avenue, passing numerous beaches and harbors in Lincoln Park.

The Drive also extends south from its Route 66 junction for eight miles, connecting the Museum Campus near downtown with the Museum of Science and Industry in Jackson Park.

Cruising Lake Shore Drive during non-rush hours on a bright, sunny day is one of the greatest urban motoring experiences in the United States. The vast blue expanse of Lake Michigan, dotted with sailboats and pleasure craft and bordered by sandy beaches, stretches out in horizontal contrast to the architectural

.....
Lake Shore Drive was a quiet residential boulevard lined by some of the finest homes in the city at the turn of the twentieth century. Today it is a busy multi-lane expressway bordered by high rise buildings on one side and Lake Michigan on the other.
1908. DPC9639.



MRS. POTTER
PALMER'S
RESIDENCE,
LAKE SHORE
DRIVE,
CHICAGO.

No. 278. V. O. HAMMON PUB. CO., CHICAGO AND MINNEAPOLIS

Hotelier Potter Palmer was just one of the many wealthy Chicago businessmen who had lavish mansions along the lakeshore. Palmer's house was finished in 1885 at a cost of one million dollars. Ca. 1900. VO278.

vistas of Chicago's towering skyline. However, similar to most cities located next to bodies of water, the shoreline was once home to grimy industrial buildings, smokestacks billowing black smoke into the air, and cargo ships delivering raw materials and agricultural products to warehouses and grain elevators lining the river harbor's edge. This transformation from grime to glitz began because of, and in spite of, Cap Streeter.

Streeterville

George "Cap" Streeter was a former riverboat captain and Civil War veteran who intended to pilot his steamboat down canals and rivers to the Caribbean and on to Honduras, running guns to rebels in Central America. His plans changed once his ship was stuck on the sandbar in Lake Michigan. The sand had been piling up north of the Chicago River harbor since the 1840s, when the U.S. Army built a jetty known as North Pier one mile into the lake. The purpose of the pier was to stop the littoral drift of silt that created a natural barrier in the mouth of the river, blocking shipping transfers from the lake. With this manufactured intrusion into the lake currents, the sand that once closed the river's mouth now piled up on the north side of the jetty to create a triangular area of silt and shallows.

The lakeshore in the triangular area moved further east, but property owners on the old shore had no clear claim to the new territory. Thus, when Cap Streeter ran aground, he asserted his rights to land that he declared was beyond the limits of Chicago and the state line of Illinois. It was his own new "District of Lake Michigan," subject only to the laws of the country and not of the state or city. He quickly contracted with construction companies involved in building Chicago's new skyscrapers that would pay Streeter a fee to dump their excavated soil and demolition debris. Streeter's district soon grew to 186 acres of "made land" that he subdivided, selling lots to any takers, including prostitutes, saloon keepers, the previously homeless, and others deemed by Chicago society to be "undesirables."

Cap Streeter's motley crew of new residents created a shantytown next to the palatial mansions and property of some of Chicago's leading business people. Retailer and hotelier Potter Palmer; the McCormick family, owners of the *Chicago Tribune* and the McCormick Reaper Company; and industrialist N. K. Fairbank, manufacturer of soap and baking products including Gold Dust Washing Powder and Fairy Soap were among Cap Streeter's neighbors. These and other nearby landowners sued in court, arguing that although their property



Top: Nestled in the curve of Oak Street Beach and Lake Shore Drive, the Drake Hotel has been in continuous operation since it opened in 1920. The still-low skyline of Streeterville extends towards Navy Pier over a decade after Cap Streeter's battle. 1933. A50309. **Bottom:** A map showing the route of Lake Shore Drive from the newly-constructed Municipal Pier—now known as Navy Pier—to Lincoln Park. 1916. From the author's collection, courtesy of *Route 66 Magazine*.

The battle for Streeterville focused public attention on the question of ownership of the Lake Michigan shore.

deeds did not include the newly reclaimed property, they had valid claims under inherent riparian water rights because their land parcels originally bordered a natural body of water.

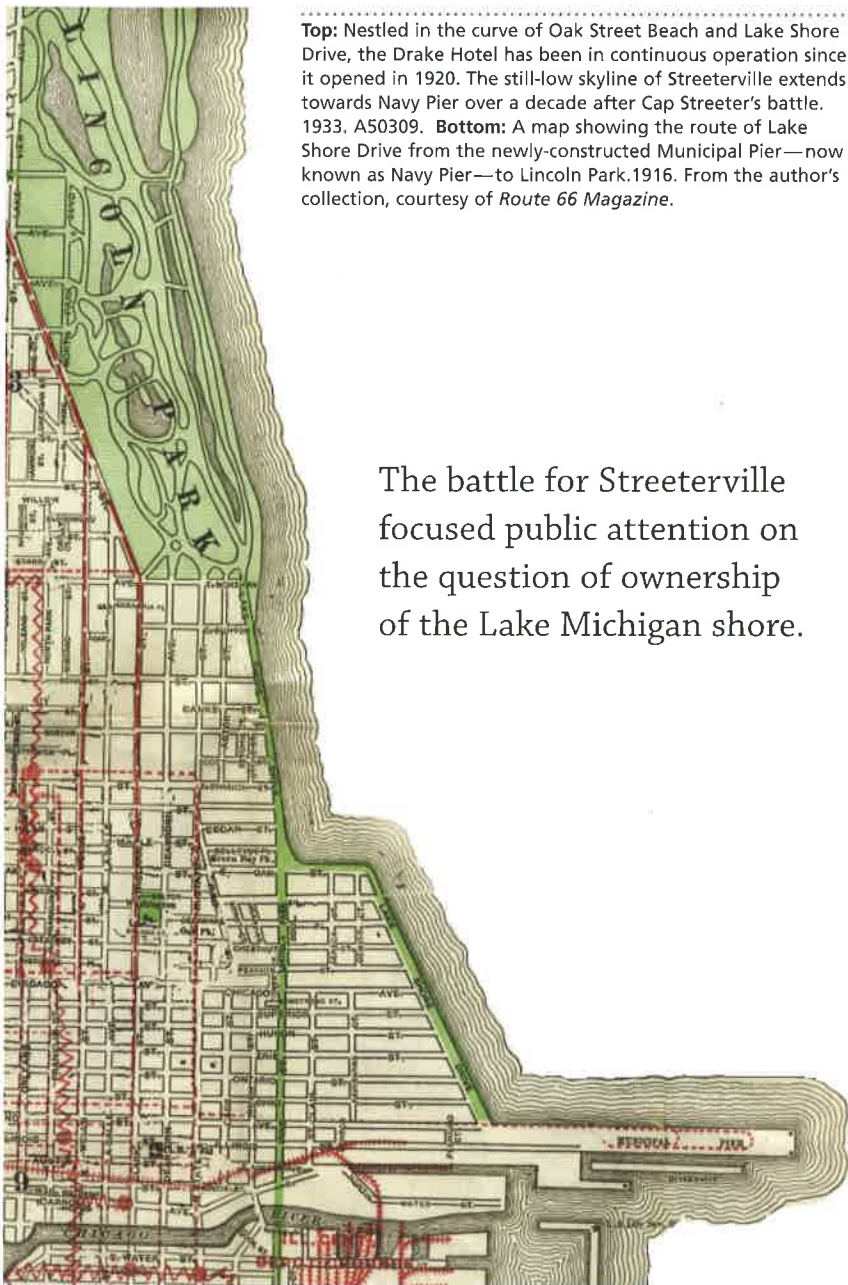
Potter and Fairbank had their own plans to build a lakefront parkway as part of the Lincoln Park Commission's boulevard system; a network of broad carriageways connecting north side neighborhoods with the public park located on the shore north of Streeter's district. Lake Shore Drive, as the boulevard was already named, originally ran about two miles through Lincoln Park from Diversey Avenue to Oak Street. Existing park boulevards in other sections of the city had proven to be great enhancements for the values of adjoining property; Potter and Fairbank wanted an extension of Lake Shore Drive through Streeter's district so they could make more money on land sales. To proceed with their grand plans, Cap Streeter and his low-rent "squatters" would have to go.

Cap Streeter's original scheme was to get a large payoff from Potter, Fairbank, and the other millionaire landowners in exchange for his agreement to vacate. When the millionaires responded with lawsuits instead of money, Streeter dug in his heels and fought back. He built a two-story "castle" in his district, the first floor was his "war room," and the second floor was his residence. When called an "illegal squatter," Streeter responded that when he arrived on the sandbar, there was not "a particle of land to squat on!" He produced a U. S. government land deed, later shown in court to be an obvious forgery, and he collected property taxes from all of the residents of his district. Fairbank came to the castle in 1889 to inform Streeter that he had to leave. Streeter chased Fairbank off with a shotgun; a show of force repeated when constables and Pinkerton agents visited Streeter. "Ma" Streeter, Cap's common-law wife, sent three deputies scurrying by dousing them with boiling water.

Some attempts to forcibly evict Streeter led to gun battles and a few deaths, but the old captain proved difficult to keep in jail. He was acquitted of one murder charge by successfully arguing self-defense. In another incident, a police officer died due to a wound in his chest caused by a lead bullet; the court found Streeter innocent when he testified that all he owned were shotguns loaded with birdshot. The 1902 death of gunman-for-hire John Kirk, led to a conviction for murder, and Streeter was sentenced to life in prison.

Nine months later, Illinois Governor Richard Yates pardoned Streeter, agreeing with Streeter's argument that he had been framed for the crime.

In contradiction to Streeter's claims, an Illinois Supreme Court decision in 1908 stated that the state had rights to the "shallows" of Lake Michigan. The state then ceded the Streeterville



Top: An aerial view overlooking buildings that made up Streeterville in the 1930s. The Outer Drive Link Bridge in the bottom left crosses the Chicago River where it meets Lake Michigan at the south-east corner of Streeterville. 1938. 8AH403. **Bottom:** A view of the many lanes of Lake Shore Drive at night, awash with light, a contrast to the quiet residential boulevard of the early twentieth century. Ca. 1985. G1964.

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Outer Drive Link Bridge and Skyline, Chicago



lakefront to the Lincoln Park Commission and construction began on an extension of Lake Shore Drive south from Oak Street to Grand Avenue, and on the bathing beaches along the new shoreline. Another controversy erupted when the Park Commission allowed wealthy landowners to assert rights to the "made land" between the new shore and their original property line; a land grab by the wealthy of property rightly belonging to the state according to many opponents. The Park Commission defended their deal with the landowners as a way to avoid costly eminent domain litigation.

Cap Streeter fought on as well, staging many "invasions" into the district, getting arrested and swearing to fight on for the land "rightly belonging to him." In 1910, he threatened to pilot a new boat up the Illinois and Michigan Canal to the Chicago River with a crew of armed men to forcibly take his land back. The city police readied themselves for battle, but this time Cap Streeter did not attack. All of the people who purchased lots from Cap Streeter were evicted because Streeter had no legal rights to the property he sold them.

Plan of Chicago

The battle for Streeterville focused public attention on the question of ownership of the Lake Michigan shore, and the result was a finding that the state had the right to create a new shoreline beyond the holdings of private property owners in the areas that had been "the shallows."

In 1909, architects and urban planners Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett seized upon this idea in their influential book, "Plan of Chicago."



The plan called for the creation of a new shoreline along the entire length of the city for parks and recreational facilities. A string of piers, islands, lagoons, harbors, and bathing beaches were to be connected by a lakefront boulevard; an extension of the drive already begun by the Lincoln Park Commission. South of the Chicago River, the South Park Commission already had jurisdiction over Grant Park on the downtown lakefront and Jackson Park seven miles south; home to the 1893 World's Fair. The original name of the boulevard through Grant Park (completed in 1926) was Field Drive, since it connected downtown to the Field Museum of Natural History. Further south from 22nd Street to Jackson Park, the South Park Commission built a new parkway named Leif Erickson Drive, commemorating the explorer often credited as the first European to step foot on the North American continent in the year 1002.

In the Lincoln Park District, Lake Shore Drive terminated at Grand Avenue on the south at the new Municipal Pier in 1916 (renamed Navy Pier



John Hancock Building and Water Tower Place



Chicago's Water Tower

Top: The John Hancock Building and the Chicago Water Tower are two very recognizable landmarks in Streeterville. The John Hancock Building, built in 1970, is known for its viewing platform. Ca. 1985. G1800. **Bottom:** The Chicago Water Tower is perhaps the city's oldest landmark. It survived the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. Ca. 1985. G1636.

after World War I). The carriageway meandered on gravel roadbed along the shore from Oak Street to North Avenue, and it continued next to a string of lagoons in the park north to Belmont Avenue. By 1926, additional lake fill made room for a wider paved drive just in time for the arrival of the U. S. Highway system. Route 41 used Lake Shore Drive from Belmont to Oak Street. However, since there was no connection across the Chicago River between Lake Shore Drive and the South Park lakefront drives, U.S. 41 continued south on Michigan Avenue to its intersection with Route 66 at Jackson Boulevard. Plans for an outer drive link bridge were shelved when the Great Depression forced the Park Commissions into near-insolvency.

In 1934, the Illinois legislature passed a bill to consolidate all of the Park Commissions into a single Chicago Park District.

The Outer Drive Bridge got help from Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, and the project was completed in 1937. FDR personally dedicated the new \$3 million bridge, at the time the largest drawbridge ever built. In 1946, the southern portion of the boulevard that had been known as Leif Erickson Drive was renamed to match the northern portion. Lake Shore Drive was now the official name of the lakefront highway from Foster Avenue on the north all the way south to 67th Street.

Cap Streeter's Legacy

Captain George Wellington Streeter died on January 22, 1921. He had continued to claim ownership of his district of Lake Michigan until his death, and his heirs fought on until a final court ruling in 1928 found in favor of the claims of the adjacent landowners. By then, Michigan Avenue along the western edge of Streeter's area had become Chicago's Magnificent Mile of posh hotels and upscale shopping. The land that still bears his name, Streeterville, is the location of the most expensive real estate in the city. Because of the Captain's fight, the state asserted the rights of the people to own the lakeshore regardless of the claims of any private property owners. This issue might never have been raised if not for Cap Streeter. His claims were never supported by law, but his legacy is a new shoreline in Chicago and the longest uninterrupted string of waterfront public parks of any city in the world.

Because of Cap Streeter's fight, the state asserted the rights of the people to own the lakeshore regardless of the claims of any private property owners.

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DAVID CLARK is author of *Exploring Route 66 in Chicagoland* and *Route 66 in Chicago*. He is a guide for historic walking and driving tours of downtown Chicago.

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Teich Archives 30th Anniversary

Katherine Hamilton-Smith

December 2012 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the arrival of postcard materials from Curt Teich & Co. forming the Curt Teich Postcard Archives at the Lake County Discovery Museum. The Teich Archives has grown over the past three decades and is now known worldwide. Katherine Hamilton-Smith, now the Cultural Resources Director, was the first archivist for the collection. In the following article, she reflects on how the archives developed from a vision to a national treasure.

Thirty years ago the Curt Teich Postcard Archives did not exist. The materials that today form the core of the archives were warehoused in Chicago, teetering on the brink of oblivion. In 1981, Ralph Teich (1925–2000), the youngest son of Curt Teich, Sr. (1877–1974), founder of the Curt Teich Company of Chicago (1898–1978), became the sole champion of these materials—the industrial archives of his father's once-thriving printing company.

Some of the materials saved during the company's years of operation, including thousands of glass plate negatives, had already disappeared forever into a landfill. Ralph Teich alone carried an understanding of the historic importance of the Teich Company's archives and a vision for a public archive of postcards, not just from his father's company, but a comprehensive collection which would include postcards by many printers and be widely available. At his own expense and on his own time, he worked diligently to communicate his vision to others in order to find an institutional home interested in sharing and developing the vision. In addition, he approached the Curt Teich Foundation¹ and secured a gift to fund physical and intellectual arrangement of the collection and provide complete support for the collection once he found an institution to take it.

Teich presented the idea to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. Fortified with an interest in the American built environment, the National Trust expressed theoretical support, but lacked the institutional structure to organize and provide access to such a collection. Closer to home, he approached the Chicago Historical Society (now the Chicago History Museum). To stay true to their mission, Historical Society staff expressed interest in the images of Chicago, but not in undertaking the entire collection.

Teich had a decision to make: should the archives be broken up and offered to various local or regional institutions—Chicago images to Chicago institutions, New York images to New York institutions, and so forth? Or should he continue to search for a place that would understand and share his objective of creating a comprehensive collection of postcards and related materials? He opted for the latter course of action. A longtime resident of Lake County, Illinois, he approached a local institution, the Lake County Museum (now Lake County Discovery Museum) in Lakewood Forest Preserve near Wauconda, Illinois.



Teich Company executives pose for a photograph in front of the wooden cases that housed the company's postcard archives. In December 1982 these cabinets, along with the rest of the company materials including photographs, original drawings, and company records, were delivered to the Curt Teich Postcard Archives. Ca. 1925.



The Curt Teich Postcard Archives is located in a wood frame house on the museum campus. Originally the house was the main residence on Lakewood Farm, a gentleman's farm which was a showplace with Guernsey cows, pigs, horses, extensive orchards, gardens, and grain production. This image shows the building before the additions and renovations that increased collections storage space. Ca. 1984.



Katherine Hamilton-Smith transferring postcards from the Teich Company's wooden boxes to acid-free boxes for long-term storage in the archives. The staff spent months rehousing thousands of drawers of postcards, which included removing rubber bands and paperclips. 1984.



Over the past thirty years, more than a dozen people, staff, and volunteers, have assisted with cataloging postcards. A process that continues today with each new donation. 1984.

The Lake County Museum was, on the face of it, a surprising choice. In 1982 the museum was not yet accredited and had a collecting scope entirely focused on the history of Lake County. But sometimes it is better to place a big fish in a small pond. Teich convinced the museum's then director, Gary Keller, of the importance of the Teich Company's visual archive, showed that the materials were in a precarious situation and needed rescuing, and successfully communicated the potential of a comprehensive postcard collection with easy public access. Keller was convinced and concluded that this collection could, "put the Lake County Museum on the map," and could in fact give the museum a collection with far-reaching, even global research



Since 1999, the museum has had an active digitizing program. Approximately 30,000 postcards have been digitized and are available to the public through the Teich Archives website at www.TeichArchives.org or through the Illinois Digital Archives at www.IdaIllinois.org. Steve Ferrigan (right) discusses a digitizing project with Brendan Quinn. Ferrigan has been the museum's digitizer since the program's inception. 2008.



The Teich Archives Collections Committee (from left) Debra Gust, Christine Pyle, and Heather Johnson review postcards offered to the archives as a donation. The committee evaluates every postcard on its condition, research potential, and to ensure it fits the museum's collecting scope. 2009.

value. Armed with this message and a significant gift from the Curt Teich Foundation, Keller went to the Lake County Forest Preserve District, the museum's parent organization, for approval from the Board of Commissioners to acquire the collection.

While this was happening, the materials themselves were still in Chicago, still teetering. They needed to be moved to the suburbs—a monumental feat in and of itself because of the sheer size of the collection. Finally, in December 1982, five full-sized Mayflower moving vans were loaded in Chicago. Each day for five days, one of the moving vans pulled up in front of the wood frame house on the museum campus, designated for the newly named Curt Teich Postcard Archives. The materials completely filled each van. When the doors were opened on arrival, the material was flush to the door opening and the movers had to remove file cabinets in order to get into the moving van itself.

After five days, both floors of the building were jam packed. Gross arrangement had to be made according to similarity of cabinets because the collection came largely without organizational resource documents. The postcards, photographs, original drawings, and other materials had numbers, but the numbering system documents were scanty and in disarray, and much work was needed to create organization. Museum staff simply had to chip away at the iceberg, figure out "item one," and start there to do the hard-but-fun sleuthing work of arranging literally millions of pieces of paper.

Cut to today—thirty years later—Ralph Teich's vision has been realized in spades. The Teich Archives is widely recognized as the world's largest public collection of postcards and related materials. Unlike postcard collections in other museums such as the Getty's collection focusing on real photo postcards, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Walker Evans Collection, or the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's Japanese Collection, the Teich Archives encompasses postcards on any subject matter or location, created by any company or individual at any time from the late nineteenth century to today. The Teich Company "iceberg," which forms the core of the Teich Archives, is organized and searchable, and many important private collections have been added, including most recently the Leonard A. Lauder Collection of more than 35,500 Raphael Tuck & Sons Oilette postcards.

Ralph Teich's vision and tenacity almost single-handedly saved an important resource from destruction and created a world-class collection.

Notes

1. The Teich Foundation was a non-profit organization established by Curt Teich Sr. and his wife Anna, to aid, sponsor, promote and contribute to philanthropic, charitable, or educational endeavors or organizations.



The postcards are stored in archival boxes in specialized cabinets with pullout drawers. Each cabinet has doors that are closed at night, and the lights are turned off in the storage rooms when no one is working in them. Ca. 2000.



Researchers from around the world make appointments to use the original materials available in the Teich Archives, Ca. 1987.



Collections Assistant Deanna Tyler rehousing some of the oversize Teich Company items. Referred to as the 'D' series, these materials consist of blotters, brochures, pamphlets, letter-head, envelopes, souvenir booklets, foldout postcards, and oversize advertising pieces in addition to postcards. 2008.



Research has changed over thirty years. Many notes are still taken with pencils, but now laptops are often used. In addition, the archives has many more collections and resources available for research. A security camera screenshot of the reading room, 2010.

New Donation

DEXTER PRESS: A POSTCARD EMPIRE

Steve Vignocchi

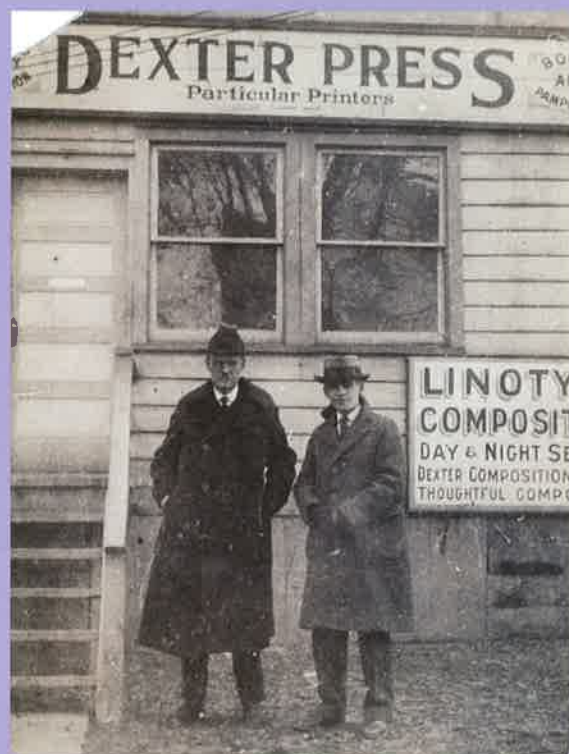
Thomas A. Dexter was born in 1899 in Pearl River, New York. His uncle, Talbot Dexter, founded the Dexter Folder Company and invented the first paper folding machine for newspapers and magazines. Thomas Dexter's father worked as a salesman at his brother Talbot's company, so it could be said that Thomas Dexter was born to be a newspaper man. In 1908, at the tender age of nine, he received his first printing press as a Christmas gift. It was a modest machine, capable of printing material only in a 4-inch by 6-inch size, but he was hooked. With his new Christmas gift, he began printing business cards for his classmates, forming his first "company," called "Thoughtful Printing." Dexter was already an astute businessman, only charging his classmates five cents for a pack of twenty-five cards so they all could afford his services.

In 1915, Dexter enrolled in Park Ridge High School in New Jersey where he learned the finer points of printing and graduated in 1917. After a one-year military service and a brief stint at the A&P store in Jersey City, New Jersey, Dexter noticed an abandoned building in Park Ridge which housed a printing press. He acquired permission to use the facility temporarily. When the building eventually went up for auction, Dexter purchased it for \$500 using money he had saved up during high school while selling Fuller brushes. Dexter hung a sign on the front door that read "Dexter Press: Thoughtful Printing," and he was open for business.

The first year was a tough one for Dexter. As the only employee, he often worked twenty hours a day to cut down on costs for his new business. By 1924, he contracted to print the Pearl River News, buying the newspaper outright a year later for \$1,000. In addition to his printing duties, Dexter doubled as a news reporter with an assistant to help get stories for his new paper.

He continued to work twenty-hour days during the Great Depression. He wanted to save \$25,000 "in case of an emergency." He was proud of saying that the same money he saved during the Great Depression was still there after it ended. The Hearst Corporation approached Dexter about

Top: Tom Dexter (right) and his father, Thomas C. Dexter, at the first Dexter Press building in Pearl Ridge, New Jersey. 1920. Bottom: The press room at the plant in West Nyack, New York. Skids of printed postcard sheets need to be given a highgloss coating and then cut. Ca. 1955.



Dexter Press Materials Added to the Teich Archives



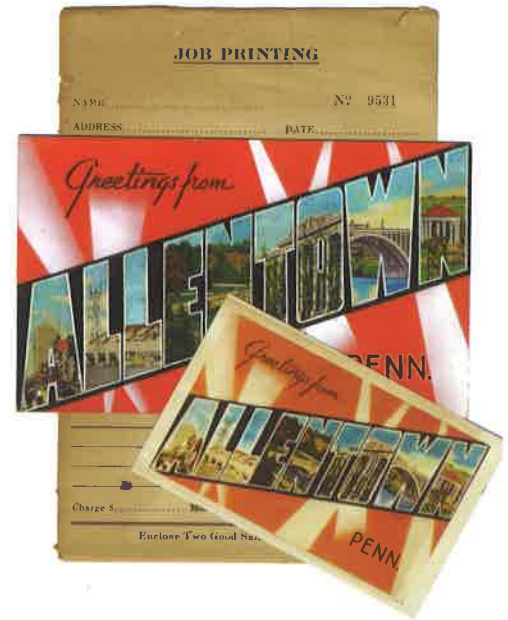
The first postcards printed by Dexter Press were called Silvercraft. They were black and white images printed sixteen to a sheet on a cylinder press. The postcards were very popular and profitable, but Thomas Dexter was always eager to try new ideas. By the 1940s he was experimenting with color processes. Soon the company was printing color "Dextone" postcards. Ca. 1940, DX15929.

publishing "The International News Service." This was initially a dream come true for Dexter, but it soon turned in to a nightmare when Hearst's publishing empire went bankrupt, leaving behind stacks of past due bills—bills for which it is unclear if Dexter ever received payment.

By 1934, newspaper sales were declining, so Dexter decided to try his hand at postcard manufacturing. He called his new venture "Silvercraft" and dove into the business with the same fervor that he had used to build his newspaper business. Initially, the postcards were printed in black and white, and he used what were called "halftone engravings" which were purchased from a Hackensack, New Jersey engraving company. One of the employees at that company, Axle Peterson, took notice of what Dexter was doing. He was impressed by Dexter's work ethic and creativity, so much so that he quit his job and went to work doing halftone engravings directly for Dexter. Dexter did not have a lot of money to pay his new employee, so Peterson agreed to lend his expertise in engraving in exchange for room and board in Dexter's home. Eventually, they were able to move the engraving operation out of the garage—the only space where they could fit the equipment—and into a plant on Railroad Avenue in Pearl River.

Dexter was so convinced that he could make a profit with this new, off-shoot business that after two years he divested himself of all his newspaper publications to focus solely on manufacturing postcards. That same year, Dexter hit on another idea. Instead of paying salesmen to go around selling his postcards, he offered the opportunity to photographers who could get orders from local businesses for advertising postcards and take the photos as well. This way, he could get the orders in much more quickly.

Up to this point, Dexter's postcards had been black and white, but now he began experimenting with the development of color postcards. To this end, he purchased a new building adjacent to the one he already had and he built his first darkroom. He developed a technique where alcohol-based colors were sprayed through a tympan paper stencil to get the color he desired on to his postcards. The results were beautiful, but it was messy for the person charged with the actual spraying of the color, so he invented a machine that sprayed upwards of sixteen different colors. This also produced beautiful postcards, but it used nearly five gallons of each color to get the desired effect on the postcard. In addition, the process was slow and, as a result, Dexter could only print around 250 sheets per hour. Clearly, he



The new donation of Dexter Press materials included production files with original artwork for the postcards. Ca. 1950, DX9531.

In the spring of 2010, the Curt Teich Postcard Archives was contacted by Tommie Reardon, daughter of Thomas Dexter, founder of Dexter Press. She was interested in finding a permanent home for some of the materials from her father's printing company.

The Dexter Press collection accepted into the Teich Archives consists of approximately 13,000 chrome postcards; 20,180 linen finish postcards; 2,000 black and white postcards; and one box of photographs that were used to make the black and white Silvercraft postcards. In addition there are over 2,400 job printing files made up of 7¾-inch by 4¾-inch photographs that were hand-painted and used to make the color separations for printing the four-color linen-finish postcards. Each file contains a hand-painted card, the separations, and a copy of the printed postcard.

Rounding out the donation are photographs of the interior and exterior of the Dexter Press offices, a scrapbook with articles, photographs, and brochures from the 1920s to the 1980s, and a copy of the book, *The Dexter Post Card Story* by Thomas A. Dexter.

The Dexter Press materials are an important addition to the Teich Archives. Dexter Press was a competitor of the Curt Teich Company (although Curt Teich and Thomas Dexter had a friendly relationship), and adding the industrial archives of another postcard company supports the goal of the archives to collect and present the history and significance of postcards.



Top: Exterior of the West Nyack, New York plant. Whenever a client was scheduled to visit, a red carpet was actually put out at the main entrance. Ca. 1955. **Middle:** Personnel representing Dexter Press during the bidding for the contract to print materials for the New York World's Fair (1964-1965). Thomas Dexter is fourth from the right. 1963. **Bottom:** Dexter Press began producing the Dexter Natural Color postcards by 1945. The new style was very popular and soon Dexter postcards had passed Curt Teich & Co. postcards in sales. DX49971 or 40497.

needed to work on this process if it were ever going to be a profitable venture for his company.

By the 1940s, Dexter had perfected his technique for producing color postcards, although he lamented the fact that his postcards were never as good in quality as those of his competitors, particularly those from the Curt Teich Company. Luckily for him, a new product, Kodachrome film, was invented, and soon Dexter was using Kodachrome techniques to manufacture his postcards. He was very secretive about his new manufacturing process. It took six people in an assembly-line fashion, and Dexter made sure that each person in the assembly-line knew his own job, but nobody else's. No one employee was going to learn everything about the new process.

Dexter began selling his natural color postcards for five cents apiece to local customers. In short order, he started selling them from Virginia to Michigan, all the while doubling and tripling his price per bundle of postcards. Business was booming, and the home office payroll increased to seventy-five people. Being a hands-on owner, he continued to go out with some of his photographers, taking scenic pictures all over the country and developing black and white proofs using a device of his own invention that fit inside a briefcase.

During a trip to Dusseldorf, Germany for Drupa, an international printing equipment show held every four years, Dexter discovered "photo gelatin," which was being used in Europe to make postcards. The pictures from this technique were soft in tone, continuous in gradation and had remarkable definition in detail. Dexter thought he could use this technique to improve the quality of his postcards. When he got back home and started using the photo gelatin, he saw that the picture quality was, indeed, stunning. Unfortunately, the new addition to his postcard making process proved to be time consuming and only allowed him to produce 1,000 postcards from a single print, so he abandoned the photo gelatin technique altogether.

Dexter was ready to build a plant specially designed for producing postcards, and in 1952 the company moved to a brand new facility in West Nyack, New York. In addition to postcard manufacturing, Dexter took a page out of his Uncle Talbot's book and installed bindery, cutting,

and paper folding machines in the same building. Six years later, he built a plant in Ormond Beach, Florida to do the color separating for the postcards. This led him to form World Color which manufactured natural color separations for printers throughout the country. Within a decade, the total number of people employed by Dexter grew to 350 in the United States and Canada.

Amid the successes of the Dexter Company, the New York World's Fair held in 1962 was a milestone. Early on Dexter was eager to cash in on what seemed to be an extremely lucrative deal for his company. He outbid and paid an advance royalty for a place for his company to be seen at the fair, even beating out the Colourpicture Company for exclusive franchise rights to sell natural color postcards and a full line of allied products. In the end, his instincts were correct and the fair ended up being extremely profitable for Dexter's publishing empire.

By 1970, Dexter decided he was ready for retirement from the business he founded and built from the ground up. That year, Consolidated Foods in Chicago purchased Dexter Press in West Nyack, New York, as well as World Color in Florida and Dexter Colour in Canada. To ease the transition, Dexter agreed to stay on the payroll as a consultant for five more years. The acquisition of Dexter's company was profitable for Consolidated Foods; by 1980, they were able to churn out as many as one million postcards per day. Dexter could now focus on his new-found passion—horse breeding and racing.

Dexter enjoyed his retirement immensely, spending most of his time buying and caring for a sizeable stable of racehorses. He died on March 25, 1993 at his home in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey at the age of ninety-three. During his lifetime, he had secured a patent for registering transparencies in a printing frame, and his company had won many national awards in recognition of his service and developments in the world of printing. While the name "Dexter" may not appear on the back of that postcard you'll send from your next vacation spot, you can thank Thomas A. Dexter for helping make that postcard as bright and as vivid as it could possibly be.

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STEVE VIGNOCCHI has a BA in American Studies and is finishing a Masters at DePaul University. He has worked in radio at WXLC FM/WKRS AM, Waukegan, IL. He was a volunteer at the Teich Archives 2011-2012 and is currently a Documentation Associate at Baxter Health Care.

In the Media

Images from the Curt Teich Archives are used in a variety of print and online media, films, and exhibitions. *In the Media* is an annotated list of where Teich Archives images can be found.

McCrea, Ron. *Building Taliesin: Frank Lloyd Wright's Home of Love and Loss*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press. 2012. ISBN 978-0-87020-606-1



In Ron McCrea's book released by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press in 2012, he tells the story of architect Frank Lloyd Wright's summer home, Taliesin, in Spring Green, Wisconsin. McCrea puts the building and completion of the house into the context of the events occurring in the architect's life.

Construction of the house, which began in 1911, encompassed a time of Wright's best known works and one of personal tragedy—his infamous affair with Mamah Borthwick that ended tragically with her murder and a fire at Taliesin.

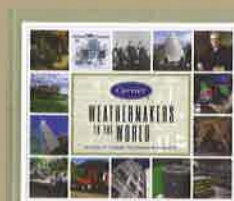
Many of the photographs and illustrations are from places that Wright visited in Europe and Asia, as well as never-before-published images of the construction of Taliesin.

The book uses two Teich Archives postcards of Chicago's Midway Gardens, which were designed by Wright.



Chicago's Midway Gardens were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright to be a European-style concert garden and restaurant. 1915. R58765.

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Schultz, Eric B. *Weathermakers to the World*. United Technologies. 2012. ISBN 978-0-9850693-0-8



On July 17, 1902, Willis Carrier, a young research engineer initialed a set of mechanical drawings of a design to solve a humidity problem plaguing a printing plant. This design was so novel that it would lead to the invention of modern air conditioning and one day launch a company.

Weathermakers to the World, by Eric Schultz, chronicles the rich history of the Carrier Corporation. The book highlights the impact of air conditioning on nearly every field and facet of daily life—from households,

to food production, to oil fields—over the past 110 years.

A Teich Archives postcard of Toffenetti's Restaurant was used.

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Cagle, Erik. "Bits and Pieces: Iconic Postcards Preserve the Past." *Printing Impressions* 54, no. 10 (2012): 46.

Erik Cagle highlighted the Curt Teich Postcard Archives in the "Bits and Pieces" section of *Printing Impressions* magazine, a publication for commercial printers. Cagle points out the value of postcards as historic documents and the importance of preserving them. He also discusses the Teich Archives' biennial Postcard Art Competition and Exhibition (PACE) and its printing sponsor, Lake County Press.

A Teich Archives Large Letter Route 66 postcard illustrates the article.

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The **Curt Teich Postcard Archives** is the largest public collection of postcards in North America, consisting of millions of historic images that tell the story of late 19th and 20th century life. The industrial archives of the Curt Teich Company of Chicago, which operated from 1898 to 1978 as the world's largest printer of view and advertising postcards, is the core collection of the Teich Archives at the Lake County Discovery Museum. It is the intention of the museum to preserve this resource and highlight the importance postcard views have for understanding history.



Connect Online: www.TeichArchives.org

The *Curt Teich Postcard Blog* at teicharchives.blogspot.com discusses the picture postcard as art, visual document and popular culture icon.

Become a fan on **Facebook**; follow us on **Twitter**
@TeichPostcard

Lake County Forest Preserves
www.LCFPD.org



Postcards from the Teich Archives can be seen daily in the museum's permanent postcard exhibit *Bringing the World Home* and in the Art Nouveau-themed John High Gallery.